

Van Dorn House
Van Dorn Drive
Port Gibson
Claiborne County
Mississippi

HABS No. MS-205

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

VAN DORN HOUSE

HABS No. MS-205

- Location: Van Dorn Drive, Port Gibson, Claiborne County, Mississippi. Van Dorn Drive originally called Marginal Street Extension South.
- Present Owner: Douglas Lum, Van Dorn House, Port Gibson, Mississippi 39150.
- Present Use: The house being slowly restored by the present owner who lives on the premises.
- Significance: The house was constructed c. 1830 by Peter A. Van Dorn, who was prominent in territorial and early statehood politics. Peter Van Dorn's son, Earl, won fame in both the Mexican and Civil Wars. (He captured General Grant's wife, Julia, at Holly Springs.) The building represents the Federal style of architecture, which is rare in Mississippi.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1830.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Ownership: The family of the present owner, Douglas Lu, had previously conveyed the property to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The Department had formed Friends of the Van Dorn House in order to raise money to restore the building. When that effort failed, the house was returned by the Department to the Lum family.
4. Original plans and construction: The plan of the Van Dorn House is based on the traditional single pile arrangement, enlarged by a rear wing. The house originally contained three sizeable rooms and a stair hall on each floor.
5. Alterations and additions: During the 1880s, a one-story brick utility porch and a kitchen were added to the south end of the house.

B. Historical Context:

The Van Dorn House was built by Peter Van Dorn, a native of New Jersey who established himself at Port Gibson in the early 1880s. In 1810 he was appointed clerk of the Superior Court and later became clerk of the Territorial House of Representatives. In 1821 Van Dorn became the first judge of probate for the Orphans Court, and served on the commission which laid out the New Capital at Jackson. His

Earl Van Dorn distinguished himself in the Mexican and Civil Wars. General Van Dorn's raid on Holly Springs, which destroyed much of General Grant's supplies gave the Union Army one of its most severe defeats in Mississippi.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Van Dorn House is a notable example of Federal architecture, a rare style in the State of Mississippi. Its Flemish bond brickwork and interior woodwork are its finest architectural features.
2. Condition of fabric: Deteriorated but stabilized. The house has been stabilized, and the windows have been repaired by its present owner who lives on the grounds. This work was accomplished under a grant obtained for the purpose by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History during 1983 and 1984.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The two-and-one-half-story house numbers 5 bays across its original, or north facade. The house is L-shaped.
2. Foundations: The brick foundations are laid in five-course common bond.
3. Wall construction: The walls are constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond on the facade and in common bond on the side and rear elevations.
4. Structural system: Load bearing masonry walls.
5. Stoops: Single story stoops are indicated on the brick walls but no longer remain extant.
6. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys.
7. Openings: The principal doorway on the facade was designed with narrow sidelights and an elliptical fanlight. The windows are double hung with 12-over-12 glazing.
8. Roof: The roof is gabled with half-hip at the meeting of the two wings. Projecting bricks simulate a modillioned cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Both floors follow the same plan: single pile arrangement with a two-story extension to the south of the east chamber.
2. Stairways: The double flight staircase has an intermediate landing. Balusters and newels are no longer extant but the delicately scrolled step-ends survive in place.
3. Flooring: Wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The stairhall ceiling is treated with a border of plaster reeds and a similarly detailed chandelier medallion. The walls are plaster above and below simple chair rails.
5. Doorways and doors: Six paneled doors are hung in early nineteenth century architraves designed with a wide, beaded fascia surrounded by a molded backband.
6. Decorative features: Fine, Federal mantels survive within the house, although they were not in place in 1975. The mantels are designed with fluted pilasters, a five-part frieze, and returned shelves.

D. Site:

The house stands on the crest of a steep bayou in a wooded setting. One outbuilding, two stories high with a wide overhand and balcony remains. It is two bays wide and constructed of brick laid in common bond.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Mississippi Department of Archives and History, National Register File, Claiborne County, Van Dorn House.

Telephone conversation with Mr. Kenneth Ppool of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. December 5, 1984.

Project coordinated by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Elbert Hilliard, Director. Data compiled by William Allen, Architectural Historian, 1974.

Edited by Marion K. Schlefer, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., 1984.